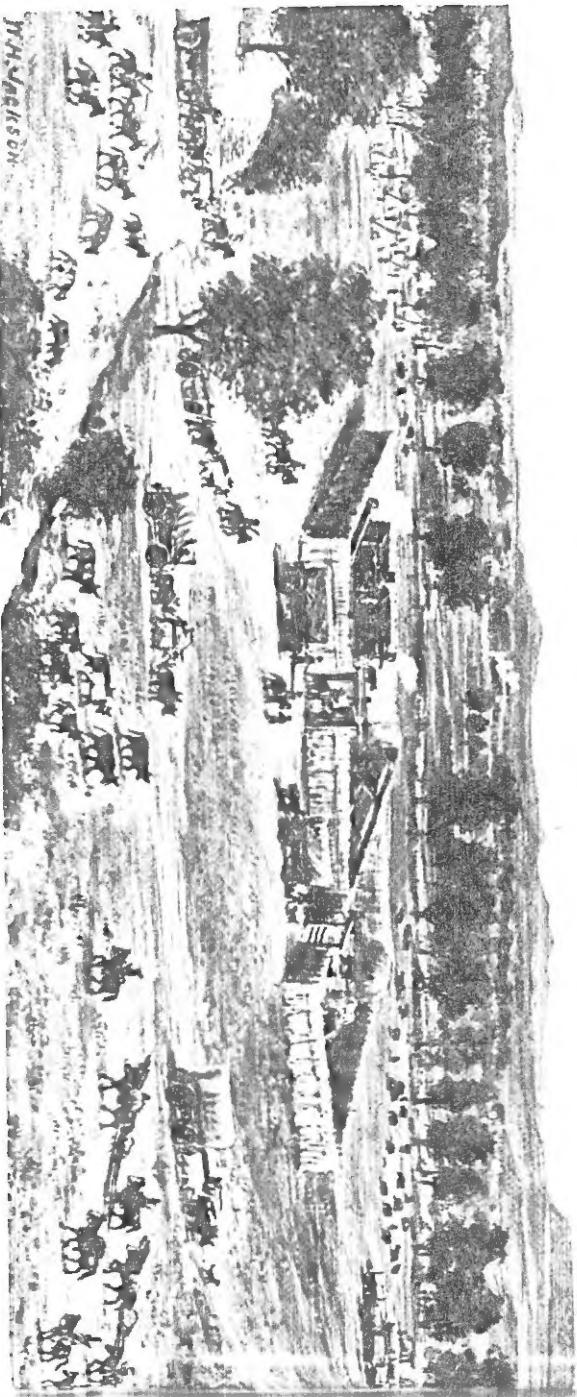
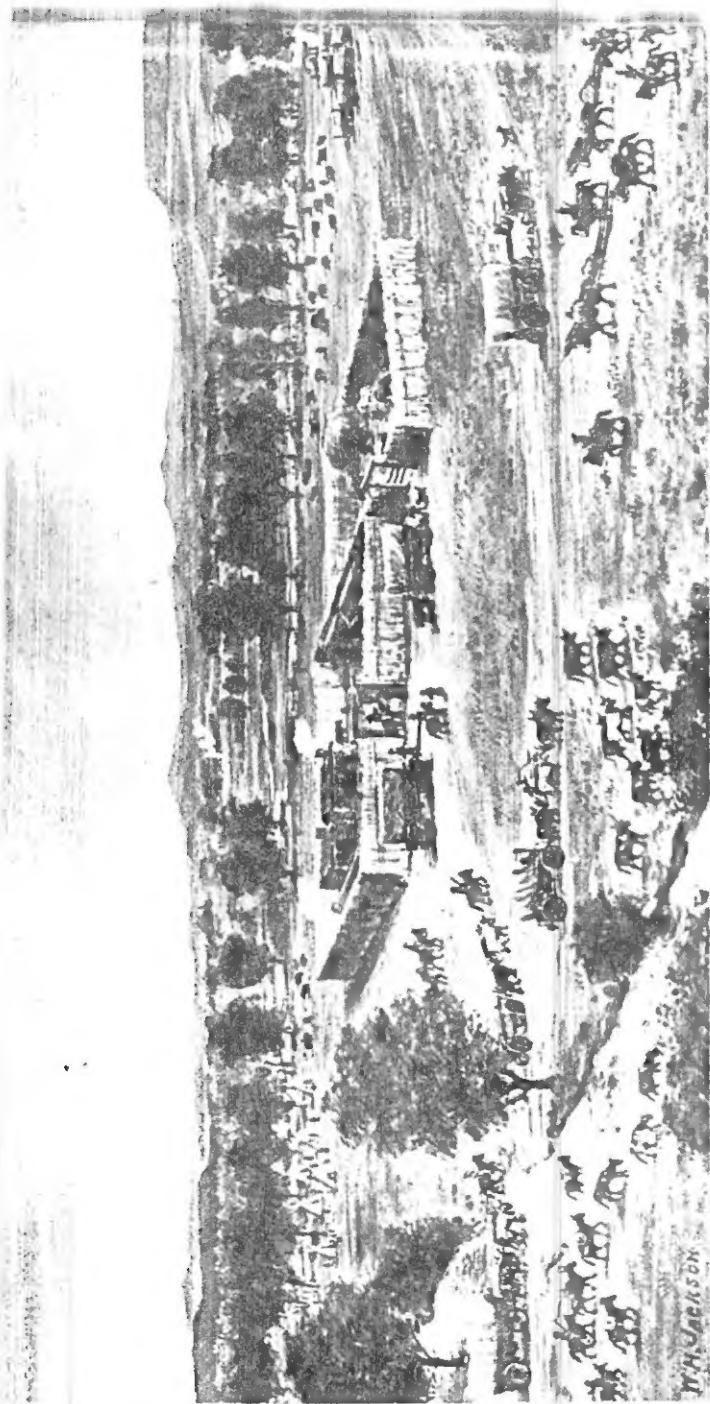


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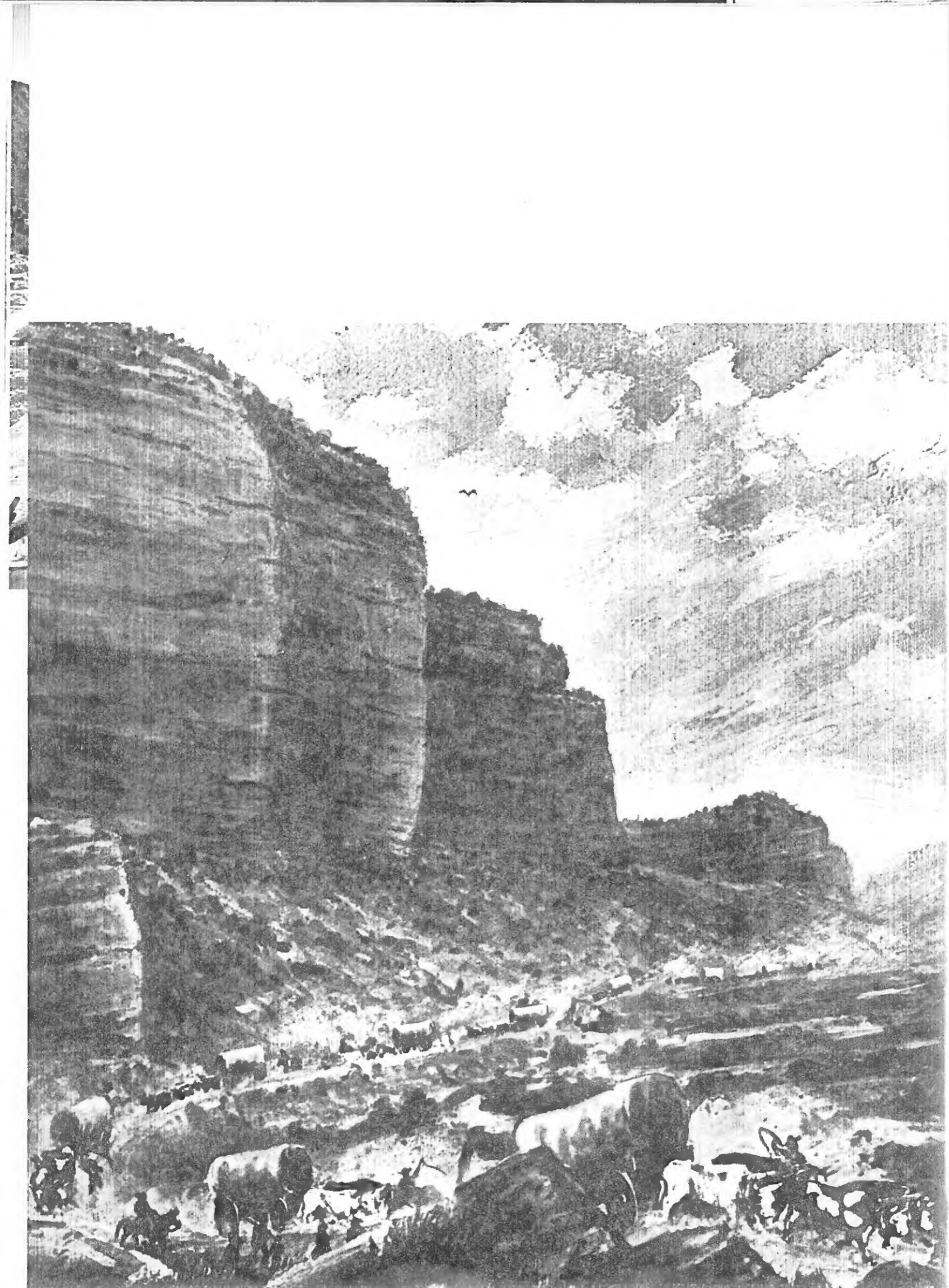


Fort Bridger in Wyoming, built by the famed trapper, was an important supply base for wagon caravans through Utah, including the Mormon Pioneers beginning in 1847 (William H. Jackson)

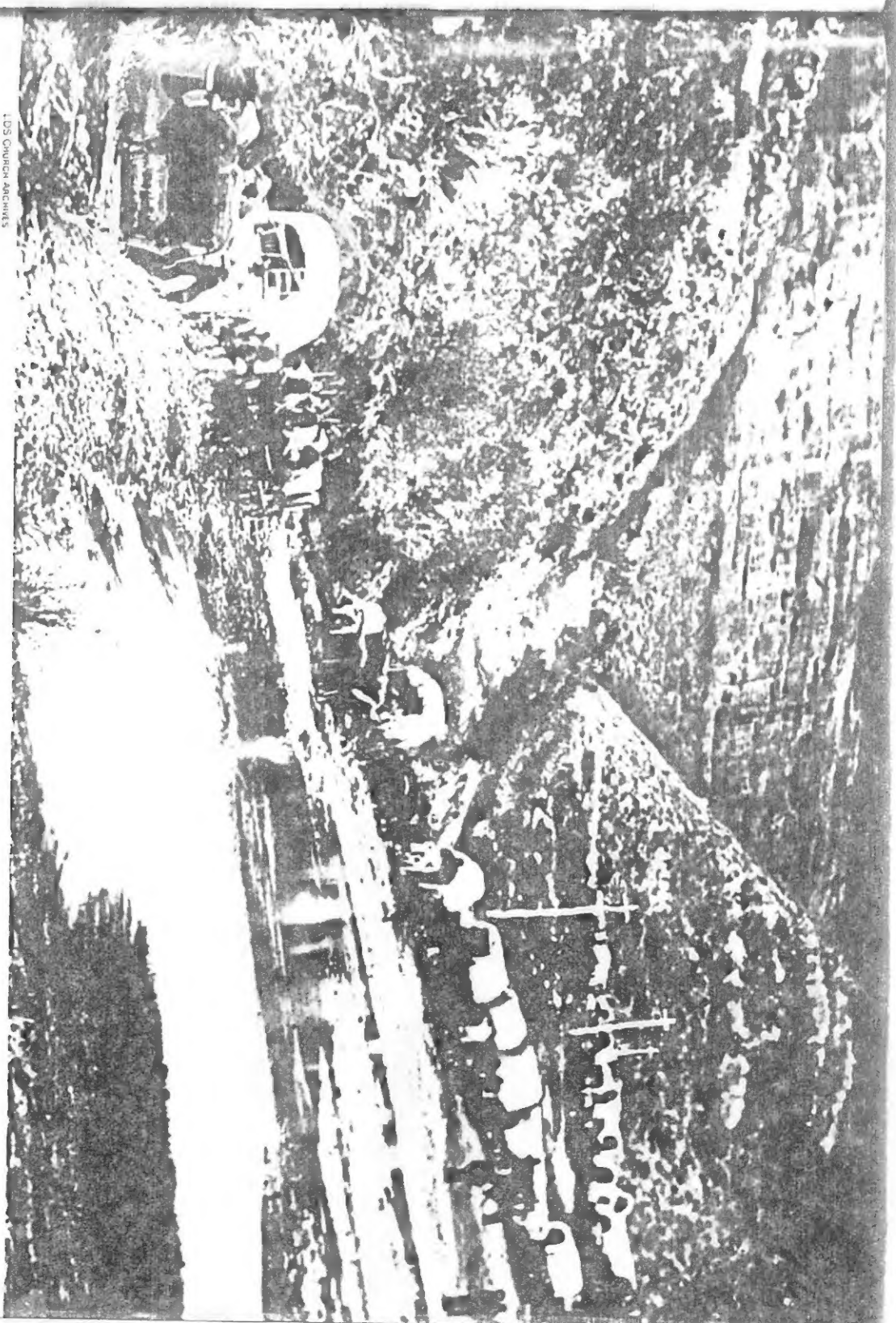
Fort Bridger in Wyoming, built by the famed trapper, was an important supply base for wagon caravans through Utah, including the Mormon Pioneers beginning in 1847 (William H. Jackson)



WILLIAMSON
UTAH STATE HISTORICAL SOCIETY



Charles William Carter
photographed this pioneer wagon
train moving down Echo Canyon
toward the Salt Lake Valley in 1867.
Seen also are telegraph poles for the
line completed in 1861





A pioneer covered wagon caravan pauses for noon rest at the Coalville Corral before proceeding toward the Salt Lake Valley (in 1867 by photographer Charles William Carter)

May 13

THURSDAY

Some took time out to visit Indian village

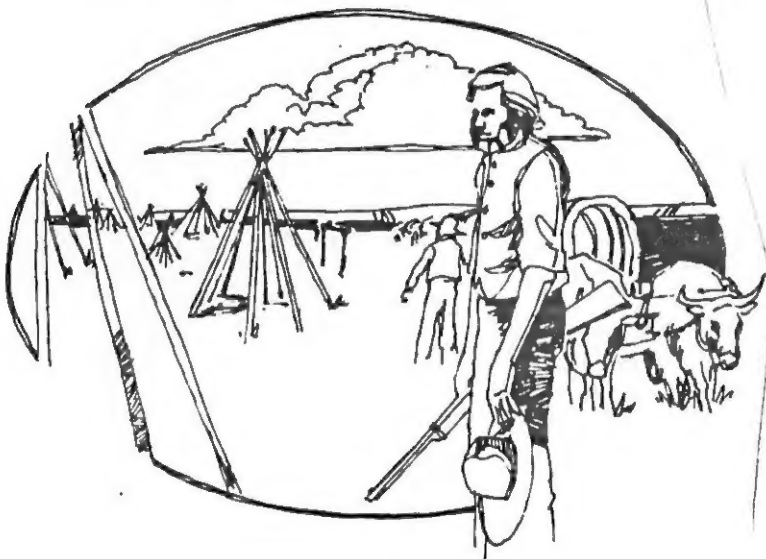
Brigham Young ordered the bugle blown at 4 a.m. so the camp could get an early start, but despite this pre-dawn stirring, it was five hours before the wagons were rolling.

Some members of the camp took time after breakfast to visit a nearby abandoned Sioux village. The empty settlement contained more than 400 lodges.

The Mormon pioneers marveled that the Indians had left so much behind. There were pieces of buffalo robes, furs, moccasins, horse halters and other items. It was as if the Indians had newly outfitted themselves and thrown away many of their older goods.

Those who visited the Indian camp collected many of the odds and ends, either for their personal use or as souvenirs. Like tourists in years to come, they were always on the lookout for small items to carry away as keepsakes of their journey.

The morning weather was raw and cloudy. It was cold enough that most of the pioneers donned overcoats and buffalo robes. The wind was blowing strongly from the north.



Hard feelings were evidenced between two men in the company as a result of an incident the night before. Thomas Tanner had arrested Aaron Farr and put him under guard part of the night, apparently for being too boisterous when the camp was called for prayer.

"Perhaps Aaron was a little out of order in conversing loud after the horn blew for prayers, but I think Brother Tanner's angry spirit more blameable," William Clayton confided in his journal.

At 8 a.m. the pioneers began rounding up their livestock, but it took another hour before the wagon train could start moving westward again. As they

traveled they noticed the grass was beginning to improve, probably because the buffalo were not as plentiful as in previous days.

During the day the pioneers came upon a river about 100 feet wide flowing from the northeast. They were unable to find any reference to it on their charts. "There is no mark on the maps showing that such a river flows," Thomas Bullock said.

The pioneers forded the stream with difficulty because the bottom was mostly quicksand. Three wagons became mired while crossing, but teams were doubled and with the help of men pulling ropes, the wagons were dragged free. The men got very wet.

On the other side, high sand hills reached all the way down to the Platte River and blocked the route. Scouts rode ahead and found a way through the bluffs without a major detour. A mile out of the way the pioneers discovered a valley leading through the obstacle.

Brigham and the other leaders decided to camp at the stream they had just crossed and tackle the trail through the sand hills the next day when the teams were more rested. Sand always was the worst terrain for the animals, making the work of pulling the wagons extra hard.

While waiting for the report of the scouts, Bullock said he found "a very pretty green snake which I played with on the end of a stick. I was afterwards told it was one of the most poisonous of snakes."

The sand hills harbored a large population of snakes and they were a real hazard for the unwary.

Brigham and Heber C. Kimball sighted a large rattlesnake while on a scouting expedition and said it was the largest they had ever seen.

The pair were among the most active horsemen in the entire company, always out in front of the wagon train to find the best route and locate midday resting places and camp sites for the night. Because of the cold wind, both were nearly frozen for their efforts this day.

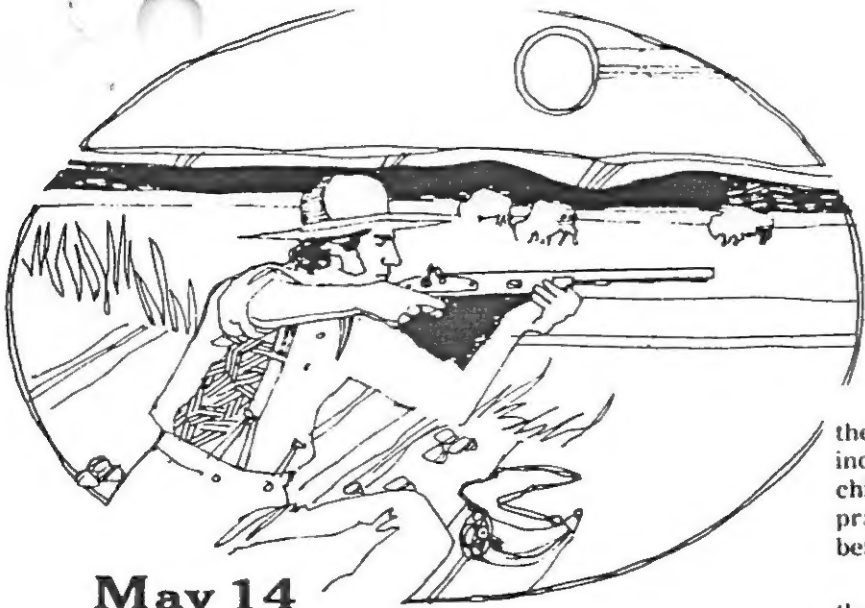
Only 10 and three-quarter miles were gained by the pioneers by the time they made camp, but the feed for the cattle was an improvement over previous places. The only fuel for fires was buffalo chips. No trees were to be seen anywhere among the sand bluffs.

That night Wilford Woodruff had some observations about the nearby Platte River. He said it was a very unusual river because it was so broad (almost a mile wide) and yet so shallow that the wind pushed the water around.

On windy days the river ebbs and flows like the sea, he said.

"When the wind blows hard from the south, the water all rushes to the north shore and the depth on that side suddenly increases. When the wind is from the north, the water rushes to the south shore," he said.

In times when the wind blows hard, as it did this day, the water is pushed so far to one side "until one can walk across two-thirds of the river bed on bare ground," Woodruff marveled.



May 14

FRIDAY

On a cold morning Wilford Woodruff missed close shot

Cold weather from the previous day continued into the night and the livestock in the Mormon pioneer camp "suffered considerably," according to Orson Pratt.

However, scientist Pratt measured the temperature later in the morning and found it not too terrible at 38 degrees.

Several herds of buffalo were sighted in the distance, but they were fewer in number and getting harder to bag. Wilford Woodruff hid himself on the bank of the Platte River in the early morning and waited for 17 bulls to come down to drink. He ambushed them, but in the excitement, missed a fairly close shot.

"I fired at the youngest one, but missed him," he reported ruefully to other hunters in the camp.

Before the company could get the wagons rolling, a violent thunderstorm swept across the prairie. "I nearly got wet through," Thomas Bullock said. "All took to their wagons for shelter until it was over."

Norton Jacob said he fed the last of his corn supplies to his team that morning. The feed was depleted because of the lack of grass the previous week. However, after making a zig-zag six mile march through the sand hills during the day, the pioneers discovered "better feed than we have had for some time."

Pratt climbed one of the highest bluffs where "a beautiful and extended prospect opened on every side." He said he could see both forks of the Platte River from his vantage point. The south fork was some distance from the pioneer route along the north fork.

Many Indian tracks were found along the banks of the Platte River, all of them quite fresh. The signs indicated a large group, including women and children. "But we are satisfied the Lord hears the prayers of his servants and sends them out of the way before we come up to them," William Clayton said.

An earlier report of 32 Indian ponies grazing on the far side of a bluff caused some alarm among the Mormons. But it turned to laughter against John Higbee, who made the report, when it was discovered they were "our own horses that a few of the brethren had taken over the hill to graze," Bullock said.

The company continued for several miles until another high range of sand hills blocked the path. Here the pioneers halted again until scouts could seek possible routes through the barrier.

Heber C. Kimball finally reported no trail led through the bluffs without going many miles out of the way. Brigham Young decided to camp on the spot and climb the bluffs the next day by doubling up teams.

Accordingly, camp was formed at 5:30 p.m. after having made only eight and three-quarter miles for the day. The sand hills were making it difficult to travel very far with having to seek possible detours.

Clayton said the sand in the hills was "like large drifts of snow" in some places. In other spots there were "deep chasms as if wasted by heavy rains." Wild flowers grew in the sandy soil, "not unlike the violet and very rich."

The weather warmed during the day, much to the relief of the pioneers. A light shower fell about noon, but the company paid scant attention to it.

Hunters for the pioneer camp had considerable success in the afternoon, shooting two buffalo, three antelope and a badger. It took until after dark to bring all the meat into camp. Higbee also wounded an antelope, but said it got away while he was reloading his rifle.

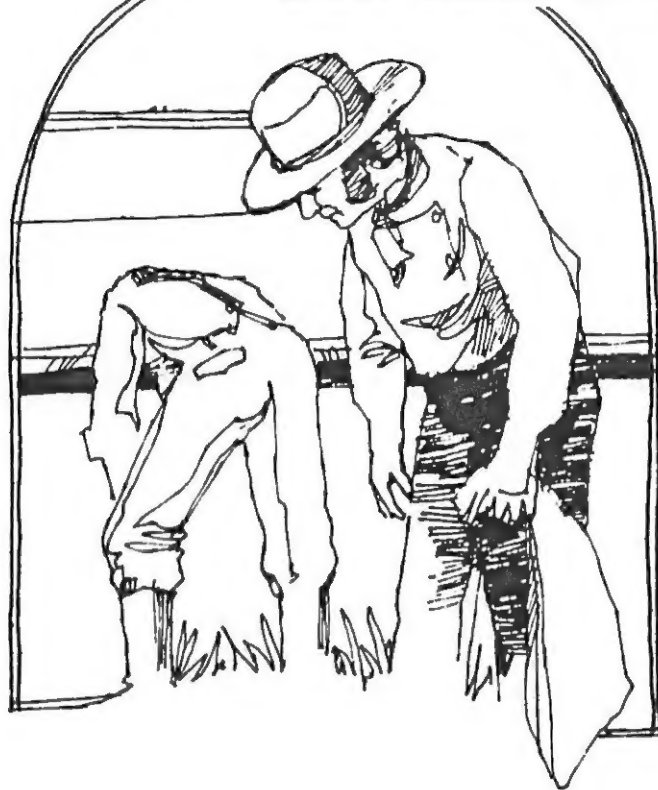
Pratt noted that Indians apparently were aware of the Mormon camp "and are lurking around trying to steal horses." There was music around some of the campfires that night "as usual," he said.

After the pioneers retired for the night, the Indians made a move. A shot was fired by a guard to foil an attempt on the animals. The camp was roused and all horses, which had been staked outside the wagons, were brought into the circle for the rest of the night.

As a result of the alarm, the company cannon was loaded and prepared for quick action. Many of the men in addition to the sentries were awake part of the night, but all remained quiet until dawn. The cannon was unloaded again in the morning.

May 15
SATURDAY

Soft sand was hard pulling for the oxen



More than 18,000 square miles of sand hills cover west-central Nebraska and the Mormon pioneers began finding these hills a frequent obstacle.

Since early in the trek they had traveled along a corridor with the Platte River on the left hand and bluffs and sand hills marching along the right hand.

But recently the sand hills closed the corridor from time to time by reaching all the way down to the bank of the Platte River, forcing the pioneers to make their way between and over the grass-covered, but sandy, rises. The hills generally weren't too steep, but the soft sand nearly wore out the teams trying to pull wagons through it.

The company camped in front of a series of bluffs yesterday. During the night a guard, Rodney Badger, noticed movement in the grass and went to investigate. A team of nearby mules pricked up their ears and snorted. Badger fired into the grass "and a man jumped up and ran away."

The shot roused the camp and all men were asked to check their own animals. The cannon was loaded, but not fired. Badger, 23, was a strong frontiersman. Before reaching the Salt Lake Valley, he was sent back to assist following wagon trains and was reunited with his wife. They entered the valley in October, 1847. He became a bishop and six years later was drowned while saving four of six children whose wagon capsized while crossing the Weber River.

At daybreak the pioneer camp found it a very cold morning, "more like January than May," according to William Clayton. The climb over the sand hills was delayed about an hour by rain, finally beginning at 9 a.m.

The company "took a wandering course through a mountain of sand, which was hard pulling for the oxen," Thomas Bullock wrote.

Where the teams descended from the sand hills "it was steeper than most house roofs and we went down in almost a jump," Bullock added.

Crossing the bluffs required travel of more than a mile and rain began to fall again. Perhaps the rain helped, but the wagons made it without doubling the teams. "We got over without difficulty, much better than we had anticipated," Clayton reported.

Norton Jacob, still worried about feed for his teams, said the prospect for "warm, grass-growing weather was not very flattering." But a short time later the company came upon an area of rich grass, "the most of anyplace this journey," according to Bullock.

"The cattle soon fill themselves, which is a comfort and blessing to the camp," Clayton said.

The pioneers also had a good supply of food. "Buffalo, deer, antelope, geese and ducks are plentiful," Orson Pratt said, noting that the hunters have provided an abundance of meat.

Not all the hunters were successful. Wilford Woodruff tried a long shot at a buffalo. His 480-foot shot struck the beast in the shoulder, but the wounded bison refused to go down and "hobbled away with the herd and I did not get him."

While food was plentiful, fuel to cook it was harder to acquire. Some pioneers scouted along the banks of the river and obtained a few sticks of driftwood. The rest gathered buffalo chips for their fires.

The dried buffalo dung "abounds everywhere," Clayton said, "but the rain has injured it some for burning."

Once again the way ahead was barred by a range of sand hills and the company decided to camp because it appeared impossible to get over the bluffs before dark. A cold and damp wind made things uncomfortable that night.

As they traveled that day the pioneers saw more Indian signs, including temporary camp sites. The Sioux apparently also used buffalo chips for fuel. They dig up the sod and pile it in a circle around the fire to provide seats, Clayton said.

"We have passed a number of these temporary little camping spots this afternoon," he said. Among the tracks are footprints and moccasins of children, making it plain that "whole families are amongst their number."

The pioneer trail at this point followed the north branch of the Platte River. Modern Highway 30 and I-80, as well as the Union Pacific railroad tracks, run parallel to the south branch of the river a few miles away.